# Chairs Report

## NASAA 2021 AGM

The NASAA Organic Chair and Board wish to express our thanks and appreciation for staff at both NASAA Organic and NCO, who have worked through difficult times during COVID-19 restrictions, to maintain and improve client interactions and to allow both organisations to remain viable.
Their important work has included developing and delivering very successful disaster recovery programs in two states (negotiations underway with others) that have made significant steps towards putting NASAA Organic back in the public/ government eye as a capable provider of sustainability information and assistance.

**Governance**
This year the NASAA Organic Board have put major effort into improving board governance.

Issues addressed included:

- Clarification of our policy stance on various organic industry matters such as the structure and function of management committees for the NASAA Organic Standard (NOS) and the National Standard for Organic and Biodynamic Produce (The National Standard), support for an organic industry peak body, and domestic regulation of organic claims.
- Managing advisory committees including existing committees and planning for more committees in the future. The NASAA Organic Board recognizes the need to engage members more directly in the general education, policy forming and lobbying functions of NASAA Organic. Non-Government Organisations such as NASAA rely upon the knowledge, experience, and commitment of members to our common interests and causes and members should be provided with the opportunity to contribute beyond the financial contribution of member fees
- Clarifying board and director responsibilities and making clear potential conflict of interest and other best practice norms
- More efficient and legally correct meeting procedures including general board meetings and the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Decisions taken by the NASAA board that reflect the current emphasis include:

- Holding more board meetings and extending the length of board meetings

(minimum of three hours rather than two), and holding one join NASAA/NCO board meeting
- Commencing the process of conducting a performance review of both the NASAA and NCO boards. We expect the reviews to be conducted in the first quarter of 2022. Neither board has ever been formally reviewed by a governance specialist before
- Starting the process of constitutional reform (see below)
- Development of a new Terms of Reference (TOR) format for NASAA advisory committees
- Restructure of the NASAA Standards and Technical Advisory Committee with a new TOR, job description and work plan
- Commenced work towards establishing a Regenerative Agriculture Advisory Committee and generally discussed how to improve member engagement by forming more advisory roles over time
- Decided to establish a members-only section of the NASAA website for discussion and sharing of ideas between NASAA members (and available to NCO certified operators)
- Requested more regular and comprehensive reporting from NCO
- Planned to include better reporting of NCO in all future NASAA AGMs
- Reviewed financial arrangements between NASAA and NCO including royalty payments to NASAA for use of the NOS and the NASAA label
- Continued to develop and improve our strategic planning documents, with a greater focus on outcomes
- Planned to conduct member webinars to contribute to improvement of our strategic plan
- Instituted a Policy Register that will track policies to ensure that they are applied to company business, or appropriately deleted if they become redundant. The register will provide a timeframe for review of policies, keep track of past changes, and indicate responsible people to ensure the policy is adhered to and that reviews are conducted as required
- Formalising a relationship between NASAA Organic and the industry charity Organic Trust Australia: Research and Education (OTARE) so that NASAA can receive tax deductible donations for future education or research projects
- Requesting that NCO withdraw from membership of the Organic Industry Standards and Certification Council. The NASAA Board has lost confidence in the structure and representativeness of OISCC and its capacity to manage standards and certification issues with appropriate due diligence and without conflict-of-interest issues.

With data to hand at the time of writing we appear to have halted the decline in membership including reducing the rate at which current members leave and increasing the number of new members.

**Constitutional reform**

This year the board has developed two motions for the AGM. The first relates to simple updating of the constitution to achieve the following:
- Remove redundant clauses and amend numbering of clauses to account for clauses removed at previous AGMs
- Remove gendered language and replace with gender neutral forms

The second motion relates to the total amount of board remuneration available and allows for a second appointed director (while maintaining the same fee for each board member). To facilitate this, we propose a small increase in the maximum board remuneration payable, from $30,000 to $35,000 (total assuming a full complement of Directors).

In addition, the board supports a member's motion that proposes to grant voting rights to our life members. Note that to avoid conflict of interest issues as Chairperson, I have agreed to continue to pay annual membership fees while I remain chair at NASAA, reverting to my life member privileges only when I cease to be the chairperson.

The board will conduct a more comprehensive review of the suitability of the constitution during 2022. The board feels that piecemeal changes to a constitution are sometimes problematic in that they do not holistically consider the entire document including how each clause impacts on every other, and how well the whole document serves the association. The 2022 review will provide adequate opportunity for member input and will provide a proving ground for engagement with our proposed members only section of the website. The board may also conduct one or more webinars where members and directors together can discuss the constitution and how it supports the strategic goals of NASAA.

**Industry engagements**

- The board formed the view that NASAA was to some extent surviving on legacy goodwill from members, certified operators, industry organisations and colleagues, media, and government. We believed that we were not responding adequately to industry issues and problems, including the opportunity presented by rapidly developing community support for regenerative agriculture, interest in organic food sparked by the pandemic, the opportunity to present organic as a partial solution to climate change, the gathering importance of local food networks (box deliver schemes, farmers market, community supported agriculture etc.), the gradual loss of smaller certified operators to local networks where certification is less critical, and to the rise of new certification opportunities (including new organic certifiers but also the large number of environmental certification schemes now available to producers and marketers).

We wish to revive the long-established reputation that NASAA has always held in Australia and around the world, as a pioneer organisation, an innovator in standards and certification practice, a quality provider of certification services (now delivered through NCO), and a reliable source of information on organic and sustainable agriculture and gardening (delivered via the NASAA website, newsletter, workshops and conferences, social and free to air media, membership of industry and government committees and other forums).

We have continued to engage with media especially on the topic of removal of GMO moratoria in several states. We have developed our relationships with media especially by engaging with the Rural Media and Communicators Association SA/NT and will pursue similar alliances in other states.

We have consolidated our relationship with the Australian Organic Recyclers Association (AORA, the professional composters association) with meetings between staff and board members, sharing newsletter content, and jointly hosting a workshop on compost use in organic viticulture. The AORA relationship is but one example of how NASAA can be more effective into the future, in developing and presenting organic and sustainability information, by securing close working relationships with other industry groups and organisations.

The valuable work of NASAA staff in developing and presenting fire and drought relief workshops is another example of our engagement with high profile current issues and has attracted positive responses from workshop participants, government facilitators and community onlookers. Our involvement in this work has already attracted promise of a bequest to NASAA.

The NASAA board believes that current confusion over dual claims to be 'the peak body' of the organic industry have been very negative and inhibited industry development. We have stated our firm support for Organic Industries Australia (OIA) as the most representative, democratic organisation capable of fulfilling that role, and have communicated our support to government and industry colleagues. We have also expressed to government our strong concerns about the lack of appropriate membership structure and proper operation of the Organic Industry Standards and Certification Council (OISCC) and have suggested that supervision of the National Standards Sub-Committee should be transferred to OIA.

We have communicated to government our view that we need an industry-wide review of how to achieve domestic regulation and our dissatisfaction with the non-representative Organic Advisory Committee established by the office of Office of Minister David Littleproud, Minister for Agriculture and Northern Australia. We believe that such a review should consider both the National Standard and the AS 6000 as potential standards applicable to both domestic and export markets, with strong emphasis on separation of the standards setting process from control of the certification bodies and possible formation of an organic industry Standards Setting Organisation with broad industry representation from genuine certified organic operators (producers, processors, handlers, and traders) and consumers. We believe that to proceed without such a review is to have neglected our due diligence obligations as leaders in our industry.

**Future plans**

Recent board emphasis on governance was necessary to ensure stability and underpin future growth of NASAA and NCO. With a sounder basis for managing policy, public engagements, and finances, we look forward to NASAA regaining more of its past acknowledgement for excellence in leadership in organic and sustainable agriculture.

In 2022 we would like to achieve the following:

- Engage more in the regenerative agriculture discussion including support for regen farmers at any level, but strongly proposing that the ultimate achievement of

regenerative is still organic, because a truly regenerative system should not rely upon degenerative inputs

- Support the development of Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) for small farmers to encourage more genuine local organic produce, intercept the slide of small operators away from certification, and otherwise achieve the goals of 'Organic 3.0'. PGS should rely upon the same organic standard as third-party certification and should be understood as a form of certification not an alternative to certification
- Support maintenance of a strong organic standard that remains true to the IFOAM principles of organic and differentiates organic produce in the marketplace. Do this in the context of an industry-owned and managed organic standard and a genuinely representative standards setting structure
- Revive our strong reputation for providing good reliable information on sustainable/organic/regenerative agriculture via general media responsiveness, our social media and websites, and active participation in industry forums including webinars, field days, workshops, and conferences. Join with industry colleagues to reconstitute the regular round of conferencing that was the glue that held our industry together in past times
- Review certification offerings including recent developments such as FreshCare and Humane Choice, while considering new innovative certification offerings such as Regenerative Organic and other potential programs
- Actively participate in the proposed formation of an IFOAM Oceania regional group (the only region to not have such a body)
- Encourage greater membership by providing leadership in the many areas where the core business of organic intersects with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including but not limited to climate change, preventing soil loss, preserving water quality, and halting biodiversity loss
- Develop more government engagement by making clear the contribution that organic production can have on the UN SDGs and by participating in government and industry forums where we can effectively present the sustainability benefits of organic
- Provide members with the opportunity to engage directly with the work of NASAA by forming advisory groups where appropriate
- Establish a bookshop to make literature available at our website, social media and workshops or other events. Consider establishing a lending library for members
- Create and make operational the proposed members-only area of the website and use that to inform members about our activities, increase discussion between NCO certified operators, NASAA members and the boards of both NASAA and NCO, and seek direct input and opinions from members.

**NASAA ORGANIC CHAIR**

TIM MARSHALL